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Thursday, 29 October 2009

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Historic Bill to Provide Quality, Affordable Health Care for All Americans Heading to House Floor

Legislation Covers 96 percent of Americans, Reduces the Deficit

WASHINGTON, D.C. – For the first time in U.S. history, all Americans would have access to quality, affordable health care under updated health insurance reform legislation unveiled by House Democrats today. The House is expected to debate and vote on the legislation next week.

The Affordable Health Care for America Act (H.R. 3962), which blends and updates the three versions of previous bills passed by the House committees of jurisdiction in July, embodies President Obama's key goals for health reform. It will slow the growth in out-of-control costs, introduce competition into the health care marketplace to keep coverage affordable and insurers honest, protect people's choices of doctors and health plans, and assure all Americans access to quality, stable, affordable health care.

The legislation will ensure that 96 percent of Americans will be covered by a quality, affordable health plan. The Congressional Budget Office estimates the cost of expanding coverage at \$894 billion, consistent with the \$900 billion coverage mark laid out by President Obama. And the legislation will be paid for. CBO estimates the bill reduces the deficit by at least \$30 billion over 10 years.

After the House Committees of jurisdiction debated and reported versions of the legislation in July, members of Congress have solicited unprecedented levels of input from the American people. Since then, the committees, House leadership, and the entire caucus have worked to revise the legislation to reflect the priorities that Members heard from their constituents.

"As we've worked to reduce the overall cost of this bill, I am most proud that we've done so without shifting greater costs to middle and lower income families," said U.S. Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA), the Chairman of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Health. "A strong public health insurance option is a key component to holding down those costs by injecting real competition and accountability into the health care marketplace. While achieving savings from Medicare, we have also re-invested in the program to eliminate the prescription drug donut hole and strengthen the program's financial footing. This bill is a real win for American people of all ages, America's businesses of all sizes, and the budgets of our nation and our families."

"For too long, health care has been a privilege, not a right in America," said U.S. Rep. Charles B. Rangel (D-NY), the Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee. "This bill ensures that every American has access to high-quality, affordable care that meets their needs, while also working to slow the staggering growth of health care costs. We have worked long and hard to develop this consensus legislation that incorporates feedback from our constituents to deliver reform that will and protect and strengthen coverage for those who have it and help cover those who are currently uninsured."

"For over 70 years, generations have fought to bring the promise of quality, affordable health care to every American. Today is a groundbreaking moment in this historic effort," said U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), the Chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee. "The Affordable Health Care for America Act reflects the hard work and input of many members of Congress and the American people and lives up to the principles that President Obama has laid out. We are closer than ever to guaranteeing every American access to quality, affordable health insurance and giving middle-class families and businesses relief from crushing costs, while reducing our deficit."

"This is a bill that strengthens the legislation we started with in the House," said U.S. Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-CA), the Chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee. "It reflects the views that Members heard from constituents in thousands of meetings this summer and fall. It accommodates diverse views and suggestions from Members from all parts of the House. It incorporates the priorities and principles the President requested of the Congress. We listened, learned, and made improvements, and are now poised to act on a bill that will at long last make affordable, quality health care for all a reality."

"We have the world's best doctors and nurses, but because millions of our people have no access to the care they provide, we've become the unhealthiest industrialized nation on the globe. That is about to change because of H.R. 3962," said U.S. Rep. John D. Dingell (D-MI), the Chairman Emeritus of the Energy and Commerce Committee and lead sponsor of H.R. 3962. "Not only will the legislation cover 96 percent of our citizens, but it will reduce the deficit and help our businesses get equal footing with international competitors. The bill offers the chance to dramatically improve the quality of life in our nation. For more than 70 years, great leaders like FDR, Truman, Clinton, Ted Kennedy and my dear old dad have fought for a bill like this. We are too close to fail them now."

"This is a historic moment. We are one step closer to fulfilling the promise of President Obama by bringing change to Washington," said U.S. Rep. Rob Andrews (D-NJ), the Chairman of the Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions Subcommittee. The Affordable Health Care for America Act will create a better health care system that will create jobs, promote wellness, and reduce health care costs for all Americans. We will continue the fight on behalf of those suffering from ever increasing health care costs and inadequate health insurance coverage. I am honored to have participated in the creation of this important bill."

“This is history in the making for health care in America,” said U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) the Chairman of Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health. “Once these reforms are enacted, every American will be able to take comfort in the knowledge they will have access to affordable health care and that insurance coverage won’t be denied or taken away. Good health is a basic need shared by all Americans, this will make quality health care a basic right for everyone.”

The legislation will ensure affordability for workers and middle-class families, security for seniors with a stronger, more solvent Medicare program, and a healthy fiscal future.

Members also introduced at the same time critically important companion legislation, the Medicare Physician Payment Reform Act (H.R. 3961). That bill will permanently reform Medicare’s physician payment system and place it on a more sustainable footing for physicians and beneficiaries in the future.

The key components of the Affordable health Care for America Act include:

Increasing choice and competition. The bill will protect and improve consumers’ choices.

- If people like their current plans, they will be able to keep them.

- For individuals who aren’t currently covered by their employer, and some small businesses, the proposal will establish a new Health Insurance Exchange where consumers can comparison shop from a menu of affordable, quality health care options that will include private plans, health co-ops, and a new public health insurance option. The public health insurance option will play on a level playing field with private insurers, spurring additional competition.

- This Exchange will create competition based on quality and price that leads to better coverage and care. Patients and doctors will have control over decisions about their health care, instead of insurance companies.

Giving Americans peace of mind. The legislation will ensure that Americans have portable, secure health care coverage — so that they won’t lose care if their employer drops their plan or they lose their job.

- Every American who receives coverage through the Exchange will have a plan that includes standardized, comprehensive and quality health care benefits.

- It will end increases in premiums or denials of care based on pre-existing conditions, race, or gender, and strictly limit age rating.

- The proposal will also eliminate co-pays for preventive care, and cap out-of-pocket expenses to protect every American from bankruptcy.

Improving quality of care for every American. The legislation will ensure that Americans of all ages, from young children to retirees have access to greater quality of care by focusing on prevention, wellness, and strengthening programs that work.

- Guarantees that every child in America will have health care coverage that includes dental, hearing and vision benefits.

- Provides better preventive and wellness care. Every health care plan offered through the Exchange and by employers after a grace period will cover preventive care at no cost to the patient.

- Increases the health care workforce to ensure that more doctors and nurses are available to provide quality care as more Americans get coverage.

- Strengthens Medicare and Medicaid and closes the Medicare Part D “donut hole” so that seniors and low-income Americans receive better quality of care and see lower prescription drug costs and out-of-pocket expenses.

Ensuring shared responsibility. The bill will ensure that individuals, employers, and the federal government share responsibility for a quality and affordable health care system.

- Employers can continue offering coverage to workers, and those who choose not offer coverage contribute a fee of eight percent of payroll.

- All individuals will generally be required to get coverage, either through their employer or the Exchange, or pay a penalty of 2.5 percent of income, subject to a hardship exemption.

- The federal government will provide affordability credits, available on a sliding scale for low- and middle-income individuals and families to make premiums affordable and reduce cost-sharing.

Protecting consumers and reducing waste, fraud, and abuse. The legislation will put the interests of consumers first, protect them from problems in getting and keeping health care coverage, and reduce waste, fraud, and abuse.

- Provides transparency in plans in the Health Exchange so that consumers have the clear, complete information, in plain English, needed to select the plan that best meets their needs.

- Establishes consumer advocacy offices as part of the Exchange in order to protect consumers, answer questions, and assist with any problems related to their plans.

- Simplifies paperwork and other administrative burdens. Patients, doctors, nurses, insurance companies, providers, and employers will all encounter a streamlined, less confusing, more consumer friendly system.

- Increases funding of efforts to reduce waste, fraud and abuse; creates enhanced oversight of Medicare and Medicaid programs.

Reducing the deficit and ensuring the solvency of Medicare and Medicaid. The legislation will be entirely paid for – it will not add a dime to the deficit. It will also put Medicare and Medicaid on the path to a more fiscally sound future, so seniors and low-income Americans can continue to receive the quality health care benefits for years to come.

- Pays for the entire cost of the legislation through a combination of savings achieved by making Medicare and Medicaid more efficient – without cutting seniors’ benefits in any way – and revenue generated from placing a surcharge on the top 0.3 percent of all households in the U.S. (married couples with adjusted gross income of over \$1,000,000) and other tax measures.

- The Congressional Budget estimates the bill will reduce the deficit by at least \$30 billion over ten years.

- Estimates also show the bill will slow the rate of growth of the Medicare program from 6.6 percent annually to 5.3 percent annually.

To view a copy of the Affordable Health Care for American Act, H.R. 3962, [click here](#).

To view a copy of the Medicare Physician Payment Reform Act, H.R. 3961, [click here](#).

To view a bill summary, detailed fact sheets and more information on what the health insurance reform will mean for American, [click here](#).

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